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SUBJECT: UNAMI'S DIBS REPORT ROLLOUT STRATEGY: SRSG DE  
MISTURA LAYS OUT THE PLAN

Classified By: PMIN Robert Ford for reason 1.4 (d).

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Summary  
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11. (C) In an April 6 meeting with Charge and poloffs, SRSG De Mistura laid out his strategy and the specific steps he intends to take in the next ten days to roll out UNAMI's Disputed Internal Boundaries (DIBs) reports. De Mistura and his team have thought through possible reactions and strategies to keep all players engaged in a political process. De Mistura assessed that while PM Maliki, KRG President Barzani and others may well seek to distance themselves from the reports, in the end they all have an interest in beginning a political dialogue and the UN process provides an "alibi." The current Arab-Kurd dispute, De Mistura stressed, is fraught with danger. Violence could erupt at any time, if only because of human miscalculation in areas where Arab and Kurdish forces face off. To avoid what de Mistura called this "nightmare scenario," or simply seeing the DIBs reports die on the vine upon release, will require a carefully choreographed set of steps in which, he stressed, U.S. support and persuasion will be essential. We underlined the U.S. would seek to be strongly helpful behind a UN lead. De Mistura requested that the UN, U.S. and EU jointly go to Irbil April 16-17 to persuade Massoud Barzani to seize the opportunity represented by the DIBs reports to begin a political dialogue. UNAMI has a good plan for the immediate rollout. Its thinking for the next phase is shallower, and few Iraqis have thought of how to establish mechanisms and agendas for discussions about DIBs, much less negotiations. We will be gently prodding UNAMI and Iraqis to start thinking ahead to those issues too. End Summary.

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Maliki -- Postpone, and if that Doesn't Work, Avoid  
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12. (C) On April 6, Charge and poloffs met with UN SRSG Staffan De Mistura in his office. De Mistura opened by asking PMIN, who had recently had a series of meetings with various Iraqi leaders, including the Barzanis in Irbil, for his assessment of the situation. De Mistura then provided his own analysis of the motivations and political calculations of the key players. Maliki, he said, just wants to "postpone, postpone, postpone....he believes time is on his side," both for his own political future and for the Arab position in Kirkuk and other DIBs. Maliki had tried to persuade De Mistura several months ago not to get involved in the DIBs issue; Maliki said that he would take care of "handling his Kurdish friends." De Mistura said that that option has now been closed by the support of UN Security Council members, as well as Iraq's own Ambassador in New York, for UNAMI's work on DIBs. De Mistura expects Maliki -- knowing the reports are coming -- will "shrewdly" do all he can to personally avoid receiving them, and instead will delegate the issue to someone else on his team. Beginning a

negotiation, to Maliki, inevitably means "yielding part of the Arab world to the Kurdish world," whereas standing aloof both insulates the PM from criticism and allows him to intervene as needed without being bogged down as a negotiator. In addition, De Mistura commented, maintaining a tough stand frames Maliki as the steadfast defender of Arab rights and strengthens his hand in the run-up to parliamentary elections. PMIN responded that Maliki is miscalculating if he believes Iraqi Sunni Arabs will support him in national elections.

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Barzani -- Caught between Iraqi Real Politic  
and Internal Kurdish Political Pressures  
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13. (C) Turning to what he called the other key player in the disputed boundaries issue, Massoud Barzani, De Mistura opined that Barzani understands that "this is not the time to take over Kirkuk." However, internal Kurdish politics require Barzani to push nonetheless, De Mistura noted. This tension is compounded by Barzani's distrust of Maliki (a mutual, and deeply personal, feeling between the men, PMIN pointed out), and his sense "that the UN has exhausted its usefulness for me." De Mistura proposed that the UN, U.S. and EU jointly approach Barzani to brief him on the reports and reassure him that the International Community's support for Kurdish aspirations remains strong.

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Hashmi -- Afraid to Be Seen as Impotent  
in Defending Arab Rights  
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14. (C) De Mistura said Iraqi Vice President Tareq Al-Hashmi has warned him that issuing the DIBs reports will only prove inflammatory. Like Maliki, his instinct is to postpone, also believing that time is on the Arabs' side as the U.S. military prepares to withdraw and the Kurds grow more isolated politically. In addition, De Mistura said, Al-Hashmi sees himself as particularly vulnerable: "the Arab side will expect him to defend them against the Kurds and he will be accused of being weak" when he is unable to meet that expectation.

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The Nightmare Scenario No One Really Wants  
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15. (C) While Maliki, Barzani, Hashmi and others each have reasons to wish the DIBs reports away, De Mistura noted, none -- in the end -- truly wants to see the situation dramatically worsen. If they did, De Mistura surmised, they have had ample opportunities to spark serious violence. Nevertheless, with Iraqi Army and Kurdish forces facing off, there is a very real threat that human error or miscalculation could lead to "a nightmare scenario."

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352 Pages of Reports - An Alibi for Everyone  
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16. (C) De Mistura said he concluded that delaying release of the DIBs reports will only raise the odds that the situation would worsen: Maliki and Barzani will become ever more "negatively focused" on elections, the personal animosity between them can only deepen, and the chance for "human error" will increase with time. The only alternative, he said, is "to throw on the table 352 pages of reports and say 'here we are, at least read through this.'" The reports (which he said are almost all complete and have begun to be translated) "are not restrictive and not prescriptive; they show that no one is perfect and it gives them all an alibi"

for avoiding the trap of their own rhetoric.

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Turkey -- Engaged, Involved, Active  
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¶7. (C) De Mistura stressed the important role Turkey can play to mediate between Baghdad and Irbil. The Kurds, he said, "feel comfortable with them" but also recognize that the price of Turkish support is that "you don't take over Kirkuk since it's a clear Turkish redline." De Mistura went on to say "Turkey is on our side, we should be helping them."

To that end, he is sending Deputy SRSG Andrew Gilmour and UNAMI Political Officer Peter Bartu to Ankara in the coming days to discuss with the Turks how best to move forward together. He noted that Gilmour and Bartu have requested a meeting with Ambassador Jeffery while they are there.

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The Next 10 Days Step-by-Step  
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¶8. (C) De Mistura then went on to provide a fairly detailed roll-out plan for the next 10 days. U.S. support (as well as that of the EU) will be essential, he stressed. In particular, De Mistura requested that the U.S. (along with the EU) travel with him to Irbil April 16-17 to make the case on DIBs to Massoud Barzani. The plan he laid out is as follows:

-- April 9 or 10: UNAMI will share the reports with the U.S. Embassy only for our review. De Mistura recalled the press leak but said it ended up working like a trial balloon that enabled him to gauge Iraqi reactions more accurately. That said, De Mistura underlined, only the U.S. would receive advance copies of the reports and they must be kept confidential.

-- April 10 or 11: De Mistura will invite DPM Barham Salih  
Q-- April 10 or 11: De Mistura will invite DPM Barham Salih and FM Zebari to his residence to read the reports for "accuracy." Both had complained previously about factual errors in previous UNAMI reports and had requested the opportunity to correct any mistakes. De Mistura said he would honor this request, but not allow them to take copies with them.

-- April 13: De Mistura meets with us, the Czech Ambassador (as EU President) and other "Friends of the DIBs" for a thorough briefing of the case he will make to PM Maliki (or one of Maliki's advisors if Maliki declines to meet with him), and jointly with them to Massoud Barzani.

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-- April 15: De Mistura briefs Maliki and/or his advisors on the key points of the reports, but not present the full reports at that time. Later the same day, he provides the same briefing to President Talabani.

-- April 16-17: De Mistura, PMIN and the Czech Ambassador travel to Irbil for a detailed briefing and discussion with Barzani (preferably overnight to provide plenty of time). De Mistura suggested that it would be beneficial for General Odierno to have a follow-on meeting with Barzani shortly afterward in order to reinforce the message and get Barzani's reaction.

-- April 18: UNAMI provides both Maliki and Barzani the full reports.

¶9. (C) De Mistura agreed with our view that, to the extent possible, this entire process should be kept out of the public eye and press. De Mistura said he expects there will be leaks and he would seek to correct any inaccurate information as appropriate.

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"Benign Non-Neglect"  
and "Controlled Unhappiness"  
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¶10. (C) The initial objective of his plan, De Mistura explained, is to gain agreement from all sides to review the reports and accept them as a basis for discussion. How this discussion is structured, De Mistura said is best left up to the Iraqis. The optimum initial reaction to the reports, he said, would be "controlled unhappiness" from all sides. Enthusiastic support by any one side would cause fear and suspicion with the other sinking the process immediately. Assuming his initial steps are successful, De Mistura envisions what he characterized as "benign non-neglect" -- a UN-mediated dialogue that can begin slowly and at a level comfortable for all, but that is sustainable. Participants would discuss the contents of the reports, identify which aspects are "doable and negotiable" and then come up with mechanisms and formats to move ahead. PMIN cautioned that moving to this phase was the critical part but would not be easy. No Iraqi figure we've met has thought deeply about mechanisms and discussion structures, much less negotiating formats. In this regard, efforts such as the current trilateral mechanism involving Iraqi Army, Peshmerga and U.S. Military officials on specific security matters could offer a model for a UNAMI-mediated forum for dialogue on other issues.

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Comment and Action Request  
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¶11. (C) We believe that De Mistura's assessment of the motivations of the parties, and his plan of action, are realistic. His plan is a good combination of highly specific near-term steps and a broad, flexible strategy for managing the reactions to the reports (and, it is to be hoped, then move on to negotiations among the parties). Unless otherwise instructed, we will support De Mistura's approach and accept his invitation to participate in the briefing of President Barzani and other KRG officials in Irbil.

¶12. (C) The harder part is figuring out a plan for May and June - how to go from sharing reports to actually organizing a useful group that can begin discussions on at least some aspects of the DIBs reports. Here the UNAMI thinking is much shallower. Obviously much of that depends on Iraqis' thinking too. We will be discussing with UNAMI and reliable Iraqi contacts what kinds of mechanisms and agendas would be manageable over the next week.

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